

Environmental Quality Commission

Northern Kentucky University Environmental Resource Management Center

Public Forum on Environmental Issues in Northern Kentucky

A public forum was held on September 26, 2000 at the Business and Education Center Theater on the Highland Heights Campus of Northern Kentucky University. More than 100 people were in attendance at the meeting, which started at 7:20 p.m. and adjourned at 10:45 p.m.

The forum consisted of two panel discussions. Question and answer sessions followed the panel discussions. Following is a summary of the panel presentations.

Gretchen Bartley, Field Inspector, Florence Field Office, Ky. Division of Water

The primary function of the Division of Water is to evaluate how well industry and municipal facilities comply with the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Field Offices are the front line of the Division of Water. The offices conduct field inspections and investigations. The Division's Central Office in Frankfort make decisions about facility permitting and engineering designs. All inspections are conducted based on regulations. It can be frustrating when a problem is uncovered that cannot be resolved because the regulations do not address all issues. The office may also be slow in responding to a problem, but they do not go away. The state carries out all regulations with oversight by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Some of the most recent focus areas of the Division of Water are:

- Total Maximum Daily Limits (discharge limits in a stream or basin)
- Watershed approach to planning.
- Regionalization of water infrastructure. Combine smaller failing systems into larger ones that have more expertise and money to address problems.
- Nonpoint source issues such as:
 - Storm Sewer overflows (a problem in Northern Kentucky).
 - Sanitary Sewer Overflows (Along with Storm Sewer issues, sanitary sewers are the domain of local government because they are infrastructure and planning issues).
 - Agriculture water quality.

- On-site sewage problems (The Division is responsible only for wastewater treatment facilities and for discharges that impact the waters of the Commonwealth. The Health Department deals with everything else, such as septic tanks and lateral lines).

One of the biggest issues in the region is the siting of new wastewater plants. Planning for these needs should be done at the local level but it should not be done at the expense of the environment. Growth and the environment can be balanced through good planning.

Jeff Eger - General Manager, Sanitation District #1

The Sanitation District serves 84,000 people in Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties, covers 180 square miles, and was established in 1946. The District was not created by a city or county, but rather by the state legislature.

The Dry Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant is the primary facility of the District and processes 34 million gallons of wastewater per day. Before 1995 most cities and counties in Northern Kentucky had their own wastewater facilities and worked independently. Between 1995 and 1999 Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties and the cities within, consolidated into one regional sanitation authority (with the exception of Florence). During that timeframe the authority took control of 44 wastewater systems.

To meet population pressures and address the problems of Combined Sewer Overflows and Sanitary Sewer Overflows, the District wants to build two new treatment works. The Dry Creek facility is near capacity and many of the pumping stations cannot handle heavy rain events. In addition, population is projected to increase 18% in the next 20 years (30% in Boone County alone in 10 years).

Some of the capacity problems have been solved by fixing inflow and infiltration problems. Up to 5 million gallons of wastewater has been reduced by lining older pipes and removing downspouts from the sewer systems. Some \$18 million has been spent on this initiative and in the next few years another \$15 million will be spent.

Efforts to address stormwater are also underway through a 2-pronged approach. Thirty-five communities will be required to comply with new federal stormwater controls in the region. There will be a stormwater utility fee passed onto the customers to help pay for this. The district is also conducting an infrastructure inventory to map the area.

House Bill 651 allows for the creation of regional treatment works and this is what has occurred in Northern Kentucky. Regionalization will consolidate the resources of the region and make addressing regional issues easier. For instance,

regionalization will allow for the creation of consistent rules and allow for economies of scale. Over the next 20 years the Regionalization Plan calls for \$350 million to be spent on rehabilitation of sewer lines, construction of new treatment works, public education and monitoring.

Marshall Slagle - Planning Services Manager, Northern Kentucky Planning Commission

The Northern Kentucky Planning Commission was established in the early 1960's and began issuing planning documents every five years. The Commission acts as a coordinating body for such things as drinking water, sewers, education, and transportation. The Commission serves Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties but in the early 1980's Campbell pulled out but they have since returned to the Commission.

Some of the major issues facing Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties are:

- Maximum utilization of existing urban areas.
- Credit for older home rehabilitation.
- Utilization of brown fields instead of destroying farmland.
- Impact Fees
- The use of fees on new development to help pay for new infrastructure needs. This way, older areas are not taxed to pay for new ones. It allows for greater equity in sewer and water fees.
- Education programs for people who serve on planning boards (continuing education).

Dale Keith and Dale Huber - Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Airport

One of the biggest problems at the airport was noise. There has been a national effort since the 1980's to reduce airport noise. Consequently, some planes have been taken out of use or retrofitted with noise reduction equipment. Since 1987, noise at the airport has been reduced by a factor of 10. In addition, the airport has sound insulated homes (260 with an additional 330 more to participate), bought some homes (350), and offered to buy other homes if the owner cannot sell them at a fair market value because of the noise. These programs have reduced the number of people impacted by noise from 11,000 in 1992, to 300

currently. This was accomplished by spending \$120 million and the airport experts to spend \$30 million more. This is not to say that noise is still not a problem. The airport receives about 250 complaints a month.

Another problem at the airport is wastewater runoff from the deicing process. To solve this problem, the airport has built deicing pads where planes can be deiced and the deicing fluid collected. About 70% of the deicing fluid is collected by the airports collection system, drains and vacuums. The amount of deicing fluid used varies depending on the weather (97/98 - 350,000 gallons, 98/99 - 380,000 gallons, 99/2000 - 420,000 gallons). Most of the fluid that is collected is sent to a wastewater treatment plan, the airport is considering building its own pretreatment works.

The airport also has two three million-gallon storage tanks under construction so that they can regulate their discharges to the wastewater treatment plant and prevent large storm discharges. Also worth noting, is that the airport recycled 33,000 gallons of deicing fluid in 1999, the first year that recycling has been conducted. The remainder of the deicing fluid that was not collected remained on the planes until they are airborne. What remains on the planes eventually makes its way back to the ground and consequently to the surrounding creeks. This is why the airport has started an in-stream treatment program to help improve local water quality. The airport has a pilot project in Elijah Creek. They have put an aerator in the stream to add oxygen to the stream. That is because the deicing fluid lowers oxygen levels in the waterways. Signs of life have returned to the waterway indicating the efforts are having a positive effect.

Richard Roeding - Kentucky State Senator representing Northern Kentucky

Senator Roeding spoke briefly about unfunded mandates and the disagreements among the federal, state and local governments on how our natural and environmental resources should be managed and regulated. He also encouraged more of these sessions to address environmental problems in the region.

Dan Toberte - Tri-County Economic Development Corporation

Tri-County Economic Development Corporation is a quasi-governmental organization that promotes economic development in Northern Kentucky. It is considered one of the best such organizations in the country. The county judge executives of Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties appoint the board of directors for Tri-County Economic Development Corporation.

The Tri-County Economic Development Corporation tries to recruit manufacturing, regional headquarters, and research and development facilities to Northern Kentucky. However, they will reject firms that are not a good match for Northern Kentucky. They try to get cleaned non-polluting industries and will encourage industry to redevelop brown fields.

Mark Hult - Chair, Licking River Watershed Watch

In a continuing attempt to solve Kentucky's problems by reveling in

solutions from elsewhere Mr. Hult offered an example to counter the notion that "It Can't Be Done" in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky metro area, or in Louisville -- or anywhere else in Kentucky.

In 1983, The State of Wisconsin sued the State of Minnesota for polluting the Mississippi River by allowing Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO's). Although the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan area was the first on the Mississippi River to have an effective sewage treatment plant (1938), aging infrastructure and growth had caused sewer capacity to be exceed during runoff events with the inevitable negative impact on surface-water quality. The Governors of the two states agreed that the existing long-range plan to complete the sewer separation over forty years was unacceptable and that the process needed to be accelerated. And accelerated it was. By 1995, the sewer separation project along with other extensive infrastructure improvements coordinated with the sewer separation had been COMPLETED in St. Paul resulting in (numbers approximate and for St. Paul alone):

- 150 miles of storm sewers installed/replaced
- 238 miles of gas main installed/replaced
- 25,000 gas services were renewed or replaced
- 26 miles of water main replaced
- 168 miles of streets repaved
- 336 miles of curbing replaced
- 8,200 handicap ramps placed in sidewalks
- 6,806 new street lights were installed
- 11,000 trees were planted in boulevards

- 15,000 acres of area with combined sewers separated

Which resulted in:

- Over 28,252,000 cubic feet of storm water runoff eliminated from the sanitary sewer system.
- 653 million gallons per year removed from the treatment plant at savings of \$767,000/year.

The acceleration of the sewer separation program brought about significant improvement in the quality of the region's most accessible waters -- the 72-mile metropolitan stretch of the Mississippi River.

The following are viewed as indicators of the improved water quality:

- Pollution-sensitive Hexagenia (a mayfly) returned to Twin Cities stretch of river after a 30 year-absence.
- Bald eagles return to Twin Cities stretch of river.
- Fish population and diversity have recovered from 3 species to more than 25 species.

Department of Natural Resources established catch and release-fishing regulations to protect lunker walleyes pulled from the metropolitan stretch of the Mississippi River.

And there were broadly shared economic advantages:

- Over 100 contractors participated and profited in St. Paul's sewer separation project alone. Many, many more participate in all types of construction projects metro-wide.
- Cost-savings for each of the individual infrastructure improvements (water, sewer, gas, trees, lighting, curbs etc.) owing to synergistic effects and improved planning and coordination.
- Reduced disruption of people's lives and expense because of wasteful Band-aid repairs to the aging infrastructure.
- Marina construction and/or expansion -- nearly double the number of boat slips.
- City and businesses invested millions to revive Saint Paul and Minneapolis riverfronts.

Question and Answer Session

There was a lively hour-long question/answer session that followed the first panel discussion. Among the concerns expressed were:

- The need for retention basins to address flooding problems of 100 families within the Banclick Creek Watershed. The flooding is due to increased development along the creek. These were promised and never delivered.
- Concerns that the siting of the East Wastewater Plant at the proposed sites will drive additional growth in smaller communities that don't want it. Why should the sewer board make this type of planning decisions
- Raw sewage entering a creek from storm sewers.
- Several additional comments concerning the siting of wastewater plants in the region.
- Remarks that more forums were needed to discuss solutions to the region's environmental problems.

Closing Remarks

Aloma Dew, Chair, Environmental Quality Commission, thanked the panelists and audience members for attending. A recommendation was made by the Environmental Quality Commission that based on the interest expressed by the public and elected officials, Northern Kentucky University hold a series of forums to facilitate public discussion and seek opportunities to address environmental issues facing the region.

Postscript:

The Ky. Division of Air Quality could not attend the forum but provided an [issue paper](#) to discuss air quality issues and challenges in the region.